

A Physical Midrash of Early Zionism

Written by Ira Rosenberg

Enduring Understanding:

- Students will be able to understand the early roots of Zionism
- Students will be able to imagine the hope that the early Zionist felt, along with the struggles that occurred on the ground.
- Students will be able to connect the Hatikvah (The Israeli national anthem) with the early Zionist settlers.

Facilitator Guide:

The Facilitator reads: *The year is 1903... You are living in a small town in the Pale of Settlement in the Russian Empire. You are ten years old. It's winter time, and it's cold. You stand as close to the stove as you can without breathing in all the smoke. Mom hands you a piece of bread. As you bit into it, you think to yourself, this is 3 days old. But it's ok, at least it's something. Fresh food is hard to come by these days. But then you remember it's Shabbat. Finally a hot meal! You run to the kitchen and smell the chicken cooking. It will be a good night. As you sit down at the dinner table, you begin to hear bangs and crashes and screams. Your parents tell you to go to your rooms and close the door. You are used to this at this point. The army rolling through town to disrupt our sabbath, disrupt our times as a family.*

When it finally calms down, you run into the street and join the crowd. Everyone is silent and looking straight ahead. Our beloved synagogue has been destroyed. The windows are broken, the doors kicked open, and our siddurim, our prayer books have been cast all over the floor. Luckily, you see the rebbe holding the Torah in his hands. No one has been hurt, but you are sick and tired of the hate, of the feeling that you will never be free because of what you believe, You wish there was another way.

As the months pass, you begin to join your friends at "youth group". O how you love youth group! You play fun games, go on hikes, and talk about your dreams. You all dream of a better life, a better world. You hope for a time when you can live as a free Jew. You dream of being strong and self sufficient.

Activity: Hopes and Dreams -- A Utopian Society (8 minutes)

Students will break into groups of 3-4. Facilitator will explain that in their youth groups, they would often sit around and discuss and plan out what a society and community could look like living in Israel. The facilitator will instruct students to "map it out". Students will draw a "blueprint" for their idealized community in the land of Israel.

Narration continues: *It is 4 years later... you just left your home. Your parents said that you have 10 minutes to pack whatever you can fit into your backpack. It was time to go. As you left your house you turned around to get one last look. You begin to walk...*

Activity -- Journey to the promised land (5 minutes): everyone stand up and begin walking. As you are walking the narration continues:

As you leave your house you stop at your neighbors doors. More and more of your friends from youth group and their families join. All have a nervous look on their face, but you also see a glimmer of hope. This is the moment you have been waiting for. This is what you and your friends and your family have been talking about for many months. You are on your way, to the land of Israel, to finally live a life of freedom. You walk and walk and walk for what feel like days. Through the forests, through the farmland, and through the cities. You finally arrive at a train station that is taking you towards the land of Israel. The train is hot and damp and crowded. You are hungry and tired, and dirty, but your hope remains. Finally you are free! Once the train stops, your journey continues. You and your caravan are shuffled onto a boat. You are directed to the bottom of the boat, tired, damp, hungry, and crammed together. Your friend breaks out into song.... ***Kol od ba'le'vav p'nima, Nefesh yehudi ho'miyah. U'lefa-atei mizrach kadimah, Ayin le'Tziyyon tzofiyah. Od lo avda tikva-teinu, Ha'tikvah bat sh'not al-payim Lih-yot am chofshi b'ar-tzeinu Eretz Tziyyon v'Yerushalayim.*** *As you sing these words, you are amazed at how loud and proud you feel. No longer do you have to shelter yourself from speaking Hebrew. No longer do you have to dream of saying these words out loud. The moment is finally here. No one talks about what they are leaving behind, just what they are hopeful for in the days ahead. Finally, you arrive on the shores of the land of Israel.*

Activity: Am Yisrael Chai! (2 minutes)

When you get to land, you kiss the ground and you immediately break out into Am Yisrael Chai. Facilitator will guide students in circle dancing and celebration, as well as teach them the words to "Am Yisrael Chai"

Suddenly, you find yourself in the wilderness, just like how it is described in the Torah. The land is bare and swampy. Yet, you are determined to make it your home. For the first time, you are part of a free society. Your dreams which you dreamt up in your youth group can finally be actualized. You work hard, day in and day out, but your hope remains. Each day, you build. You build irrigation systems, you plant crops, you build homes. And each day you welcome more and more brothers and sisters who join you on this journey.

Activity: Building the Kibbutz (8 minutes)

Students will take their "blueprints" which were previously drawn and will construct their idealized society. As they build, the facilitator will take away certain privileges, like the ability to speak, or only using your feet, etc. This will demonstrate that the actuality of constructing these communities presented great difficulties.

Narration continues: *It is 10 years later. You are living in a fully functional kibbutz community. Your crop is plentiful. Your community is organized. You have become a model of success for the entire Zionist movement. More and more Jews have made their way to Israel to help develop the land. The society is strong. You have established governance, you have created armies. You are a strong people. And the world is taking notice. The British government finally declared, through the Balfour Declaration, that a Jewish state would exist in the land of Israel! What a monumental occasion! You can feel that things are happening. Your dreams of Israel becoming a home for the Jewish people are becoming real. As you listen to the news of the Balfour declaration on the radio, you join in song with your Jewish family:*

Activity: Sing Hatikvah (1 minute)

Kol od ba'le'vav p'nima, Nefesh yehudi ho'miyah. U'lefa-atei mizrach kadimah, Ayin le'Tziyyon tzofiyah. Od lo avda tikva-teinu, Ha'tikvah bat sh'not al-payim Lih-yot am chofshi b'ar-tzeinu Eretz Tziyyon v'Yerushalayim.

Debrief (5 minutes)

What was this experience like for you?

What are some things that you learned?

How did it feel to struggle in constructing your idealized society? Did you ever want to give up?

Did your hope remain?

What questions remain?